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ABSTRACT

The importance of utilizing retired school administrators as professors of educational administration and supervision is discussed in this paper. Observations based on personal experiences about making the transition from practicing school superintendent to college professor are offered. The professorial role is characterized by isolation from other academicians and educational practitioners, lack of automatic access to information, interaction with students who may devalue administrator education courses, and realization of the "constraints of reality" in regard to expectations for students. A recommendation calls for the development of a close theory-practice relationship in administrator education through exchanges between school systems and universities. (LMI)

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The New Professor of Educational Administration: Utilizing Retired School Administrators

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the importance of utilizing retired school administrators as professors of educational administration and supervison. The authors deal honestly with their perceptions in making the transition from practicising school superintendents to the professorial role. The authors present their impressions of the professorate, the lack of contact between the university and educational practitioners in school systems, lack of access to sources of information, attitudes that students place on courses taken, and the "constraints of reality." The articles offers concluding thoughts for both practitioners and professors to help move the profession forward.

TThe New Professor of Education Administration: Utilizing Retired School Administrators

After more than thirty years in public elementary and secondary education, we entered the ranks of academia. After public school careers ending in the superintendency, we now complete a third full year of teaching graduate students about educational administration. Do we have some observations about the professorate in light of our experiences? Most assuredly! Would we become university teachers again? Certainly! We continue to do what we are now doing for reasons other than monetary considerations. This work keeps us close to the profession we love and respect and in which we spent most of our lives. We believe that we can contribute to the future of education by sharing with potential educational leaders some of our meaningful experiences with schools and the people who staff, fund, and populate them.

Our primary expectations going into college teaching were that we would have the knowledge, judgment, and ability to help develop new leadership along with helping people acquire skills needed to function as school administrators. We expected serious-minded dedicated teachers who would welcome our expertise. The teachers who would become administrators would be well prepared. Those who did not get the chance to serve as administrators would have a better understanding of administration, and this would prepare them to function more effectively in the school system.

The purpose of this article is to briefly share some thoughts on the experiences both new and old that we have encountered in the university setting. We shall try to deal honestly with our perceptions and "call them as we see them," recognizing at all times that we carry a heavy burden of prejudices based on our many experiences. We are not trying to present a critique to change a world that has functioned for years in a distinguished manner without us. We certainly do not want to demean, insult, ridicule, or embarrass any of our new colleagues, whether near or remote. We present our comments and observations as members of what we consider to be a special group of what we hope will be new friends and colleagues.

The good things about our new careers are:

1. Cooperation of college faculty and administration
2. High quality of students
3. Our opportunity to learn more
4. The opportunity to succeed at something we wanted to do
5. The chance to help teachers and potential administrators understand more about administration, finance, supervision, leadership, and ethics in the practice of school administration

The difficulties were:

1. Trying to understand the way things work on university campuses
2. Preparing for different courses the first years
3. Loneliness and loss of relationships in our previous jobs
4. Difficulty in keeping up with current research and information at the university level
5. Difficulty in keeping up with current status of local school systems, State Department of Education and State Legislature.

Impressions of the Professorate

1. Without doubt our first impression of the professorate is rooted in the utter loneliness, even isolation of the position. We notice this so keenly perhaps because we became used to the camaraderie and the professional contact of our fellow superintendents. In Louisiana there are only 66 public school superintendents--64 in parishes (counties) and 2 in the city school districts of Bogalusa and Monroe. Despite the vast range in size of school districts, from Orleans Parish with over 83,000 students to St. Helena Parish with only 750 students, the 66 superintendents know one another and interact frequently. There is a state superintendents association, and there are regional associations as well. Our regional group met four times each year, and some met once a month. Additionally, superintendents were integral parts of all Louisiana School Boards Association meetings, both the regularly scheduled annual meeting and the several called meetings each year. Some superintendents were also active in

the Louisiana Association of School Executives, and affiliate of the American Association of School Administrators.

Superintendents in adjacent districts shared a particularly close relationship as we dealt with common student attendance situations and similar personnel and community problems. We shared successes and failures; we traded teachers and coached; we joined together many resources; and we cooperated on projects and programs. We spoke to one another often; we asked what one another were doing in regard to some legislation or state department regulation; and we with fewer resources, especially in terms of staff, refrained from trying to reinvent the wheel and instead adopted or adapted the policies, programs, and ideas formulated by those larger systems that had the resources and personnel to study and deal effectively with program development.

All of this is the exact opposite of what we now find in the professoriate. The authors share an office, so we see each other on the days when we both have classes scheduled. We see others in our department in passing, and we meet those from other departments in the halls. We seldom see those who work in the undergraduate division, because their classes are held during the day and ours are at night. If the authors exclude their contact with each other, it is accurate to say that there is little opportunity for professional exchanges among us and our colleagues.

2. Our second observation concerns the contact or lack of contact between the university and the educational practitioners in the school systems. Certainly we saw this same thing when we were the practitioners. It is difficult for us to retain any kind of intimate contact with practitioners even though we worked with many of those still in the schools in our area. It is obviously even more difficult for one without such a bond to intrude, as it were, into the real school setting.

Regardless of the difficulty it seems that we make a terrible mistake in not keeping in close contact with the schools and school people. If what we do in the university is to be of value, make a difference, or bring some improvement to education, then need to know what is in the field where schooling takes place. What we do in class must be relevant in making schools more effective, and that can hardly

be the case if we have no intimate relationship with the schools.

It would be an error to think that our teacher-students will furnish us dependable data we need about schools. Teachers are caught up often in a school world that does not reach beyond their classroom walls. They have an agenda distinctly different from that of the school or system administrator. The perceptions of teachers are most often those that fit their agenda and their own classroom world. They cannot furnish us that intimate, yet global view that a principal or central office administrator can furnish us.

3. Our third observation is that we no longer have automatic sources of information. As superintendents we had access to untold amounts of information. Obviously, we had data on our own school systems, and many were eager to furnish more information, whether we wanted it or not. We also received information from our superintendents association, the school boards association, the state department of education, and often the legislature itself. We no longer simply get information; we must ferret out our information now. To be certain that we would keep up with the rapid changes in education, we arranged to remain on the mailing lists of the Louisiana School Boards Association and the State Board of Education. We also maintained our memberships in AASA, ASCD, Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, and Louisiana Association of School Executives. We joined the Louisiana Council of Professors of Educational Administration, National Council of Professors of Educational Administration and Association of Teacher Educators. We retained subscriptions to Education Week, the National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal, and other selected journals.

4. For our fourth observation, we turn our attention to our students. In general we might simply label this observation "the constraints of reality." Obviously, we need to explain. Our students are full time teachers. Some may travel an hour each way to attend night classes With the exception of perhaps one class per semester that falls during a school holiday of some kind, the teachers attend their classes after having spent a full day at work. Those who must drive a long distance, those who have coaching assignments, and those who have other school duties after school may

come to their classes directly from school with no "break" in their day. Some obviously have children and family duties to attend to after school and before coming to class.

The teachers in our classes are enrolled in a program to obtain a masters degree in educational administration and supervision or simply to complete requirements for certification as a principal, supervisor, or superintendent. The teachers may be seeking a masters degree merely to qualify for an increase in pay on the salary schedule. They may have chosen educational administration and supervision simply because they believe this to be an easier path to the degree than trying to get the degree in a subject matter field. Such people often have no aspiration or desire to be a school administrator and would not accept a position as an administrator if it were offered to them. Some say they do not think at this time that they want to an administrator, but they want to have the degree and the certification "just in case" something comes up in the future.

Certainly many in our classes aspire to be school administrators. But among this group we find a curious mixture. Some are certain of their chances of becoming administrators, such as two students who were furiously working to complete requirements so that they could be appointed to positions already promised to them. Others may be terribly cynical about their chances of becoming administrators citing the small number of position openings in their school systems or the political nature of such appointments or other reasons why they will not be the one appointed.

This mixture certainly makes a class that presents a challenge. We soon faced the reality of having students who are full time teachers and part time students. Should we increase assignments and have our students neglect their full time work as a teacher and parent or should we offer reduced work assignments and not upset the balance? We found this very difficult and decided to offer the best courses that we could with high expectations emphasizing that adult professionals learn from research, each other, and their own creativity and initiative. We planned activities for each class session, used lecturing, some research, and some group activities. Out-or-class work was related to the reality of school work and not impossible to complete. We used materials from AASA, ASCD, audiotapes, videotapes, and journals all referring to

course objectives and assignments. We also kept current with the National School Boards Association, Louisiana School Boards Association, and several local school systems.

5. Our fifth observation has to do with and attitude that we perceive in our students in regard to the value they place on educational administration courses. We seem to detect a pervasive attitude that there really is not much to school administration and educational leadership other than the application of plain old common sense. Many teachers, it seems, believe that given their intelligence, their experience, and their common sense, school leadership is simply a matter of making good judgments. We seem to see an attitude that posits something like this: The powers-that-be have mandated that I have to take these courses to become certified as a school administrator. If I want to be a school administrator, I have no choice but to play along and complete the courses. However, if I became a school administrator tomorrow, there is very little in the courses that would supercede my good common sense. Some of our administrators that I know of right now are not doing such a good job, and I know that I could do as well as they are doing.

It is this observation, if it is a correct one, that we see presenting the greatest challenge to all of us who teach in educational administration. The onus of confronting this attitude falls equally on the persons who might be termed academic professors and on those who might be considered practitioner professors. It also seems that both groups must share the blame for fostering this attitude simply by failing to acknowledge the proper role of each of the two groups.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Students see the so-called academic professors with the stigma of never having been responsible and accountable for handling, on a day-by-day basis, the jobs their university positions and activities indicate that they know a great deal about. They may have to work exceptionally hard to convince students that the important thing is not just studying some theories about what practitioners do but rather finally running real schools. Perhaps some academics must overcome the old bugaboo of

considering the "training" of school administrators not to be a lofty enough goal for an academic institution.

The practitioners face a serious problem as well. We can easily fall into the pattern of treating every problem experience we ever had as a definitive case study for educational administration. The truth may be that our problem and favorite experience were unique and really do not have any further application. It seems particularly incumbent upon the practitioners to find research that really does have something to do with the operation of schools in the real world. Perhaps just as importantly, the practitioner may need to be willing to stand up and say at times that this piece of research or this scholarly article really does not inform educational practice at all.

Our most useful contribution to the department has been our ability to integrate theory and practice in our classes through examples and simulations. We have alerted future administrators to the importance of their role as visionary leaders during a period of rapid change. We used self-developed materials based on our experience and current research to help our students become effective school leaders.

The success of the use of retired administrators as professors of educational administration will depend on the retiree's ability to adjust to change and use his experiences to help the university serve local school systems.

It will be the university's responsibility to give retired administrators an opportunity to use their knowledge and experience to help in the preparation of future educational leaders. The retired administrator-professor will need to feel that the work being done is important and productive in a environment of meaningful human relationships.

We suspect that we have broken absolutely no new ground in listing the things we have observed in our short tenure in higher education. There may well be problems that some of you have already solved; they may simply be observations of the way things are, either by choice, consent, and/or necessity. If we are correct in our observations, we believe there is some need for change. Very simply, we see a need for this both within the university and between the university and the schools. There

probably is no solution to the problem of teacher-students, but surely we could share answers to some of the questions posed in this regard. Many people both inside and outside education see no real content in our educational administration courses. If we by our lack of proper concern and action allow this perception to remain, then we must expect the move for business managers in the schools as principals and corporation executives in the board offices as superintendents.

In conclusion, a proactive way to address this problem would be to assure the close linking of theory to practice and practice to theory. A sure way of doing this is to use practitioners with proper academic credentials. There are instances of exchanges between school systems and universities for a semester or for the entire year. The authors know a professor who spent a sabbatical as a volunteer assistant principal of a high school. Most school systems would probably welcome such an arrangement. What university would not benefit from a semester stay by a principal-professor? And how far would such arrangements go toward drawing together the schools and the universities?